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HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS,
ON THE
SIEGE AND DEFENCE OF FORT STANWIX,
IN 1777,
BY HENRY R. SCHOOLCRAFT.









HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS

ON

THE SIEGE AND DEFENCE OF FORT STANWIX,

IN 1773.

READ BEFORE THE NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY, JUNE 19TH, 1845.

BY HENRY R. SCHOOLCRAFT.

PUBLISHED FROM THE SOCIETY'S PROCEEDINGS.

NEW YORK:
PRESS OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

1846.

THE

SIEGE OF FORT STANWIX.

I HAVE chosen for consideration, a passage in the eventful story of the war of the American revolution. Few subjects are fraught with more intrinsic interest to the history of man, and his progress in the scale of civilization, than this remarkable appeal to arms. Historians have, as yet, failed to render ample justice to the event.

That a mere handful of people, not over three millions at utmost—scattered over a wide continent, without a government—without funds—without arms—destitute, indeed, of all the means of sovereign action, but such as the *occasion* called forth—that such a people—so few in numbers, so dispersed and so destitute, should have prevailed against the most powerful nation of modern times, is *still* the most signal event in the history of human government. Its origin, its progress, and its issue, are alike important in their influence on the destiny of nations; and viewed as they must be, in connection with the striking events of our colonization and *expulsion*, as it were, from the rest of the

* In the patriotic feeling which marked the era, and in justice to an officer then in the acme of his favor, this fort was re-named SCHUYLER, but the name never obtained currency among the soldiery or the people, notwithstanding that the official letters of the American commander were thus dated. The first treaty with the Iroquois after the war, was formed here in 1784, and was called the treaty of "Fort Stanwix," and the spot was thus denominated by the inhabitants until its walls were levelled to make room for the extension of the village of Rome. The place itself was called "Rome" from the heroic defence of the republic made here.

human family, they afford instructive themes for our study. If there be not, in the contest itself, some strong tokens of the influence of that viewless hand, which often leads nations and men, "by a way they know not of," we have failed to draw from the shining heap of historic materials which the contest furnishes, one of its sublimest lessons.

The year 1776 was the era of the appeal; but it was not till the year after, that our fathers first truly felt the responsibilities, the perils and the gloom of that appeal. It was not till 1777 that "victory or death," glory or the gallows stared them fully in the face. If the entire annals of the war be searched, this will be found to be the darkest period of their gloom; and this gloom was concentrated with its thickest darkness, on the territorial area of New York. It was *here* that the power of the enemy was drawn together for one grand effort, and the infant republic was sought to be crushed.

Washington had, indeed, within a few days of the close of '76, shed a brilliant beam of light on the waning cause, by turning on his heel, in the bitter month of December, and striking a blow at Trenton, which told the people that there was a redeeming spirit left. But he was not able long to keep the open field; and the campaign of '77 opened with discouragements and an array of concentrated military power, on the part of the enemy, suited to appal the stoutest heart. It was emphatically the year of blood. Savage murders, instigated by infuriated bands of loyalists, characterized the whole interior line of the colonies, from Georgia to Maine; while the fleets and armies of England, with all the means of efficacious offence, held all the leading cities and harbors of the sea coast.

It was in this year that the British Cabinet put into execution by far its boldest and most politic scheme, in attempting to cut the colonies in two, by means of a military cordon from Canada to the Atlantic, across the area of New York. It was *here*, within our own borders, that the infant Hercules was sought to be strangled, and the contest of the revolution terminated. To compass this end, Bur-

goyne, with his full plumed army, approached from the North. Sir Henry Clinton, with a veteran force, ascended the Hudson, and sword in hand, carried the strongest passes of the Highlands; while St. Leger, on the west, threatened still more sanguinary results, with five of the infuriated tribes of the Iroquois at his heels.

In contemplating the perilous scenes that marked this year, there is no event, which, in all its aspects, both of progress and result, partakes more fully of the character of the HEROIC, than the siege of Fort Stanwix. It is proposed to devote the short time I am to occupy, to this particular subject. Striking as it is in itself, well worthy of historic record, and full of romantic and chivalrous adventure, in some of its episodes, the story of its defence is *one*, however, which I should have hardly ventured to select, had I not something to add to the well known events from the voice of living and unrecorded tradition. This tradition is given, for the most part, from the lips of one of the veritable actors in its perilous scenes—a brave man and a patriot—whose name has been but recently added to the long list of departed octogenarian revolutionary soldiers.*

Fort Stanwix occupied the southern verge of an elevated plain, dividing the Mohawk river from Wood creek, which is now the site of the sylvan and beautiful village of Rome, in Oneida county. During all the period of our colonial history, and for uncounted centuries before, it was the thoroughfare and place of transit for the native tribes, between the great lakes of the west, and the Atlantic waters. And if the portage itself has now dropped into insignificance, it is because a wise legislation, availing itself of the hint of nature, has formed a better means of communication through the Erie Canal.

In conducting the operations of the war, which resulted in the conquest of Canada, Sir Jeffrey Amherst, in 1758,

* Col. Lawrence Schoolcraft, who is here alluded to, died at Vernon, Oneida county, June 7th, 1840, aged 84. Vide obituary notices in the *Globe and Intelligencer* of that month.

ordered a fortress to be erected on this summit. The work was entrusted to Col. Stanwix, a brave and energetic officer, who is favorably noticed in the annals of the times,* and was named after himself. It consisted originally, of a square enclosure, but was afterwards enlarged, and provided with four bastions. After the conquest of Canada by the British crown, its importance became secondary, and at the period of the breaking out of the American revolution, the works had fallen into dilapidation.

The year 1777 found Gen. Schuyler in the command of the northern department, who, while he kept Burgoyne at bay with one hand, lifted the other to shield the western frontier. In the month of April of this year, anticipating the movement from Oswego, he placed fort Stanwix under the command of Col. Peter Gansevoort, with the 3rd regiment of New York State troops; a detachment of the Massachusetts line, and a single company of artillery. His whole force numbered but seven hundred and fifty men. He had, as his second in command, Lt. Col. Marinus Willett, an officer of indomitable courage and resources, well versed in the mode of native warfare, and a well filled muster roll of subordinates, each of whom vied with the other in acts of devotion to the cause. Officers and soldiers alike felt that the eyes of their country were upon them. They were led to view their duties, not as an ordinary service, but as a sacred trust, in the performance of which any act of individual neglect might peril the safety of the fort, and the cause which they were banded together to serve. Thus feeling and acting, the commander had a weight of moral energy in his favor, which doubles the authority of command. Such are the effects of liberty upon the human heart.

The first duty was to repair the fort, which was found in a wretched state, and to strengthen the works, and in this labor they exhibited the greatest energy and diligence,

* Mante's History of the late war in America, &c. (State Library, Albany.)

during the months of May, June and July. It was during this labor, that the well known incident occurred, so interesting to the youthful reader, of an American officer, shot and scalped in the forest, whose life was saved by the sagacity and fidelity of his dog. The officer was Capt. Greig, who, in the command of a sodding party, had ventured, with his dog and gun, a little too far from the fort, and out of the reach of the guns. At this work of repairs, the garrison labored, indeed, up to the day of the investment.

Separated from the point of military support by a wide interval, and shut in from all communication with it, by bands of hostile savages, they had not the means of supplying themselves with many of the necessaries of a siege. In the haste of their march, or the scantiness of the military chest, they found themselves short of even a flag, to hoist on the staff. The deficiency was supplied by cutting up an officer's camblet cloak. And when it had been duly pieced out and finished, it was sent up to its airy height with a shout of fealty to the cause, and amid the sounds of artillery. It is from circumstances as small as this, that we may denote the temper and exigencies of the times, and recall the high devotion and patriotic resources with which the contest was waged.

The enemy appeared on the 2d of August, in an advanced party, led by Lt. Bird, with a large escort of Mohawks. On the 3d, Col. Barry St. Leger, who commanded the expedition, debarked his troops and artillery in full force, on the banks of Wood creek. and immediately took up his line of march, across the DEOWAINSTA—this was the Indian name of the portage—and invested the fort. The distance was short of two miles. He had under his command, on this occasion, an effective regiment of foot; the Royal Greens; Johnson's Rangers; a corps of loyalists originally from the Mohawks' valley, led by Cols. Butler and Claus, and the effective warriors of five cantons of the Iroquois, namely, the Senecas, Cayugas, Tuscaroras, Onondagas and Mohawks, the latter under the immediate orders of Joseph Brant, less generally known under an Indian name

of Thyendanegea. This entire auxiliary force, including the loyalists, constituted the command of Sir John Johnson.

St. Leger's whole force is stated at seventeen hundred men, which he had concentrated from Montreal and Niagara, at Oswego in the month of July. He had twelve pieces of artillery, including four howitzers and two mortars, with ample stores and munitions of every kind. No part of his force, however, exceeded, in violence and bitter rancor, the embodied tories and loyalists, who had fled to Canada from the valley of the Mohawk and the sources of the Susquehanna.

St. Leger's movements had been narrowly watched, from the time he left Oswego, by the friendly Oneidas, among whom a chief, called by courtesy Col. Louis, was conspicuous. This chief carefully reported his progress up the Oswego and Onondaga rivers, from day to day; brought accounts of the number and description of troops, and the probable time of the investment. To secure the full cooperation of the soldiery, and keep them in heart, this information was communicated to them at their respective head quarters. Tradition adds, that it turned out to be so minutely correct, that the investment took place on the very day indicated by the faithful sachem. "To-morrow," said he to the commander, "they will be here," and on the morrow the enemy came.*

The 3d of August was a day of deep scenic interest, and revealed a military pageant, which made a striking impression. It was a calm and beautiful morning when the enemy took up their line of march from Wood Creek. The intervening ground was an open plain of wide extent, most elevated towards its central and southern edge. Gansevoort's men were paraded on the ramparts looking in the direction where the Oneida sachem had told them the enemy would appear. Music soon was heard. The scarlet color of their uniforms next showed itself. They had taken their standards from their cases that morning, and as color

* L. S.

after color came into view, and they unfurled them to the breeze, an intense degree of interest was felt, but scarcely a word uttered. To many of the men who had newly enlisted, the scene was novel. Some of them had served the year before under Montgomery; others in the movements at Ticonderoga and Crown Point under St. Clair. Some veterans dated their service in prior wars, under Sir William Johnson, Prideaux and Bradstreet. There were others who were mere lads of seventeen. The Indians, spreading out on the flanks, gave the scene an air of Asiatic gorgeousness, mixed with terror. For their loud yells were heard above the British drum and bugle. The whole display, the exactitude of the order of march, the glitter of banners, the numbers present, and the impending danger of the contest, were designed for effect upon the American garrison. Not a gun was, however fired. The panorama was gazed at in silence.*

But if St. Leger designed to strike terror into the hearts of his opponents by an ostentatious display of his force, and expected an easy victory and an immediate surrender, as one of his orders, since published, prove, he was greatly deceived. The Americans, while they admired his discipline, *were counting his men*. The only effect which is known to have been produced upon the garrison, was a better appreciation of the nature of the contest they had before them, and a firmer determination to meet its utmost exigencies. In this, officers and men were one. They saw in these Indian hordes, equipped with wild feathers and glistening axes, a powerful and merciless enemy, with whom it might be their fate to grapple in open field, and they were driven, by this reflection, into still closer bonds of unity. They had before resolved as a body, and they now resolved, man by man, to defend the works at all hazards, and to "do or die" in their defence. This is the language of the commander, in an official letter.

The garrison had, at this moment, six weeks provisions,

with a good supply of fixed ammunition, but was so short of ball and ordnance stores as to limit itself to nine rounds per day, during the seige. The very balls which the enemy fired, were in truth picked up in the intervals and fired back.*

St. Leger marched up, in plain view of the troops, and took up his line of encampment on elevated grounds, on the banks of the Mohawk, east of the fort. He erected his gun batteries, with corresponding redouts to cover them, within six hundred yards of that angle of the fort. Twelve guns, of all calibre, were here quickly brought into position, and the fire opened next morning. It was soon found, however, that his field guns were too light to penetrate the works. His howitzers and bombs were therefore his most effective means of offence. And these, the garrison, during a long seige, became very expert in watching, announcing them shot by shot, and avoiding their effects by immediate prostration on the ramparts or the ground. Sentinels were stationed to watch every match applied, and to cry out "shot" or "shell!"*

Sir John Johnson, with the loyalists and refugees from the Mohawk valley, fixed his encampment on the south, or front of the fort, at such a distance as placed him without the reach of cannon shot. He had the Mohawk river immediately on his right, and the forest, with Brant's forces on his left. This made his position a strong one, should it be assailed. Parties of Indians encamped in various positions, completed the circle of investment and limited the garrison night and day, to the exact area enclosed by its walls.

The Mohawks were on the south-west. A point of woods extended from the Mohawk camp, so near to the S. W. bastion of the fort, that a rifle ball could traverse the interval. On the first day of the seige, it was observed that several shots had been fatally fired from the thick top of a pine tree, standing in the angle. A gun charged with

*L. S.

grape was brought with instant dexterity to bear on this tree. The result was, that as soon as it was fired, a stalwart Indian tumbled to the ground, together with a quantity of the cut branches.* This little incident put the soldiers in high glee, and gave a good omen of success.†

The siege had continued three days, with the daily and always fearful alarm cry of "shot" or "shell!" sung out by the sentinels, when Adam Helmer, a native of the Mohawk valley, reached the fort at an early hour in the day, with two men, bringing intelligence that General Herkimer was on his march for its relief, with the whole effective militia force of the Mohawk valley and the sources of the Susquehanna. This vigilant scout, who had eluded the Indians, brought word that Herkimer had reached the neighborhood of the Oriskany, and had given him orders to request the commander to apprize him of his safe entrance into the fort, by three heavy discharges of artillery, rapidly fired. The signal was immediately given. Gansevoort determined at the same moment, to make a diversion in Herkimer's favor. The troops were paraded in a square, and the intelligence communicated. Col. Willett then went down into the esplanade and addressed the men to this effect:—Soldiers, you have heard that Gen. Herkimer is on his march to our relief. The commanding officer feels satisfied that the tories and queen's rangers have stolen off in the night with Brant and his Mohawks, to meet him. The camp of Sir John is therefore weakened. As many of you as feel willing to follow me, in an attack upon it, and are not afraid to die for liberty, will shoulder your arms, and step out *one pace* in front.‡ Two hundred men obeyed the impulse almost at the same moment; fifty more, with a three pounder, were soon after added.

A rain storm which now came up suddenly, hindered

* I was informed by an aged Oneida, last summer, that loaded guns were drawn up by a cord from the foot of the tree, and returned after firing for the purpose of being reloaded. See Notes on the Iroquois. Alb., 1846.

† L. S.

‡ L. S.

their immediate march, but as soon as it ceased, they issued from the sally-port at a brisk pace, and rushing down upon the camp of Sir John, carried it at the point of the bayonet, drove the enemy through the Mohawk, and captured his camp, baggage and public stores. Part of the enemy were at the moment below the banks of the river, and had stacked their arms. Sir John was reposing in his tent as the weather was warm, with his coat off, and fled in this plight with his men, through the river.* The surprize was complete. All his papers, correspondence and baggage were taken. Among the captured articles were three standards—the first taken after the surprise at Trenton. It is among the traditions which I employ in these sketches, that the teams of the fort went out, and returned seven times, laden with the plunder of his camp. There were three teams in the quartermaster's service, making twenty-one loads of camp stores and munitions.*

Having rifled the camp, Willett next turned his arms against the Mohawks. Their camp was also found weakened by the warriors withdrawn to Oriskany, and was likewise taken and plundered. The few Iroquois who escaped it, made no effective resistance, but fled and dispersed themselves in the woods. Their lines were charged at a quick step, and their wigwams riddled with balls.

In the meantime, St. Leger, who occupied the elevated grounds east of the fort, marshalled a force with two brass field pieces, to cut off Willett's return. This force was for a while kept in obedience, by the guns of the American commander. When it reached an effective position, its guns delivered their fire, high above the heads of their assailants. Not a shot took effect. Willett returned it briskly with a well aimed fire, directly in front, and reached and entered the fort, without the loss of *a single man*.* The spirit, alacrity and success with which this sally was conducted, and its effects upon the enemy, render it one of the most brilliant achievements of the siege. Indian run-

* L. S.

ners were immediately dispatched by Sir John, to bear the news of this assault to Oriskany.

We must now withdraw attention to a scene, which was being enacted at the same moment as at this storied spot, at the distance of about eight miles. It has been mentioned, that an express from Gen. Herkimer reached Gansevoort, in the early part of the day, apprising him of his approach. Gen. Herkimer, on reaching the vicinity of the site of Utica, on the 5th of August, had wished to strengthen himself with reinforcements which had not yet joined him ; but in consequence of the conduct of some of his officers, who taunted him with cowardice, and as the event proved, had more zeal than courage, he mounted his horse, and gave the order "march on," and rapidly pushed forward, on the 6th of August. It was now but the third day since the fort had been regularly invested. Herkimer did not, as some accounts state, march without guards in front and on his flanks, but owing to the high words and insulting language of the morning, he pressed rapidly on their heels. He rode a noble horse, and himself led the way. By ten o'clock he had reached and descended into the low grounds of the valley of the Oriskany. A large part of his army had already entered the defile, when his guards, both front and flank, were suddenly shot down, a general discharge was poured in from higher grounds, and the wild shouts of the Indians told him he was in the midst of an ambuscade. The effects of this sudden attack, accompanied as it was by the high Sa-sa-kwon of the Indians, were appalling and sanguinary. It was impossible, in so close a defile, matted with woods, to form his men, who fell thickly around him. A part of his force which had not yet descended into the valley, and which embraced some of his rash counsellors and defamers of the morning, fled without firing a gun. He had but two regiments of militia, without a single field piece, on reaching this dreary spot ; and he was thus left to battle the enemy at fearful odds, with a reduced force, which it was impossible to concentrate. Disorder reigned,

but it was the disorder of brave men, who loved their general and who soon began to recover.

He had opposed to him in this engagement, a detachment of Sir John Johnson's regiment of greens, and Butler's rangers, with a strong body of the Indians, led by Joseph Brant, in person. They had seized a favorite position, which infested the pass. Whichever way he turned, he found himself in the midst of his enemies. The fight was hot and murderous; but, aside from the temporary panic, it was not a fight, on his part, with militia unaccustomed to Indian warfare, and Indian barbarity. The people of the Mohawk had fought in other wars. Few men in America were better skilled in this species of warfare than they. But they were opposed in the two corps of tories and rangers, by persons of the same experienced stamp. It was a fight of neighbor with neighbor. Many, who had espoused the royal cause, and fled to Canada, now returned to battle for the country, with a degree of ire and fury, which even that of the Mohawks did not exceed. Hemmed in by woods, it was, to a great extent, a combat between individuals, and the contest gave rise to many exhibitions of high, daring and indomitable prowess, which were probably never equalled in America. Herkimer himself, although surprised, conducted with the utmost bravery and coolness. His horse was shot down early in the contest, and he was thus brought to the ground, with his leg shattered below the knee. Binding it up hastily, he directed his saddle to be taken from the expiring animal, and placed on a hillock, which permitted him to sit at ease, in a position which allowed him to extend his limbs and gave him a view of the field. He then drew his tinder box from his pocket, and lighting his pipe deliberately smoked it while the battle raged around.*

In the early part of this action, the advantage was with the assailants, but, in its progress, it partook, more closely, of an equal contest. Herkimer's men began to fight in

* Campbell's Annals of Tryon County.

CIRCLES, an order of battle by which they not only protected their ranks, but poured outwardly, a destructive fire. Other portions of the command, adopted the Indian mode of fighting from behind trees, but fighting IN COUPLES, The advantage of this fighting in couples was *this*: it had been observed that as soon as a single shot, came from behind a tree an Indian rushed up, before the assailant could re-load, and tomahawked him. By fighting in couples, there was always one shot, in return, so that they were prepared for this movement, and paid the savage for his termerity. Not only was this species of order restored, but a turning point in the battle was produced, by a providential and most severe and instantaneous rain storm, which parted the combatants, and gave time for reflection and manœuvring. It was this storm which had delayed the sortie, of Willett.

Col. Butler determined to avail himself of this interim, to throw the American Commander off his guard, by feigning the arrival of an expected relief from the Fort. He knew the Americans expected a reinforcement. Disguising a detachment of the Greens, by a plain American hat, they approached from the direction of the garrison. But the trick was detected, as soon as they came within hailing distance, and the contest resumed with even greater obstinacy than before. It now, however, took more characteristically, the aspect of a contest between, whig and tory refugee and settler, loyalist and revolutionist. The Indians, who, it is now known, had suffered severely, were made to keep at a more respectful distance. They had lost, too, their favorite position of attack.

Herkimer, on the other hand, had made use of the cessation of firing, by removing to a piece of high level ground, where he had formed his entire command in a circle,* and where, as the shower broke away, he stood firmly, awaiting the expected attack. One or two incidents, in the second part of the battle, may serve to show the determined and heroic courage, with which it was fought.

* Stone's Brant. vol. 1. p. 237.

As the Greens, disguised as Americans, came up, they were hailed by Captain Gardenier, who recognized them by the colour of their coats. At the same moment, one of his men recognized a friend in the enemies' ranks, put out his hand, which the other suddenly seizing, jerked him into the ranks, with the words, "you are my prisoner." A struggle ensued, during which, Gardenier, watching his opportunity, sprang forward, levelled the captor with his spear and rescued his man. A rush was immediately made upon him by two men, of whom he slew one, and wounded the other. Three of the Greens now set upon him. In the struggle one of his spurs, became entangled in their cloths, and he fell. Both his thighs were now transpierced with bayonets. A third bayonet was aimed at his breast. Seizing it, with great energy, he wrenched it away and brought the man down upon his breast, and thus made a shield of him, till one of his own men named Adam Miller, came to his rescue. Miller was now assailed, when Gardenier rose to his seat, and although his hand had been woefully lacerated by having the bayonet drawn through it, he grasped his spear, which had fallen to the ground, and thrust the barb into the side of the assailant. He fell and expired. It proved to be Lieut. Mc Donald of the loyalists of Tryon county. In the midst of this struggle, some of Gardenier's own men, deceived by the Greens, called out to him, to desist, that he was killing his friends. He replied, "they are not friends, but enemies—fire away." A heavy volley ensued, in which thirty of the Greens and as many of the Indians fell.

It happened, at another point of the circle, that three of the Royal Greens, rushed through the ranks, to make prisoner of a Captain Dillenback—a bold and resolute officer, who was known to have declared that he would never be taken alive. One of these assailants seized his gun, but he wrenched it back, and felled him with it. The second he shot dead, and having now an empty gun, he thrust the third through the body with his bayonet. The result, however, unfortunately for this brave patriot, verified his de-

claration, for in the moment of his triumph, a shot from another hand laid him low.

So fierce a contest could not be long kept up. Besides, the firing was continued in the direction of the fort, and the enemy judged rightly, that their camp had been attacked and their presence might become necessary.* And thus the express of Herkimer and the sortie of the garrison, became directly instrumental in the successful issue of this battle. The moment the Indians partook of this fear, coupled as it was, with their own actual loss, they raised the retreating cry of "OONAH! OONAH!" and fled in every direction. The Greens and Rangers followed them, amid the huzzas and shots of the Americans, leaving the latter, masters of the field.*

Thus terminated the battle of Oriskany, one of the most bloody, and hard fought contests of the Revolutionary war. Every fourth man out of the ranks of Herkimer, it is said, was killed either in battle or burned at the stake,† and its results carried mourning into almost every family, over a wide frontier. The exact number killed, is not certainly known. The American accounts admit two hundred killed on the field, besides prisoners and missing. The British reported double that number. Of their own loss, no exact accounts were published. A prudent historian‡ makes it fully equal, if not superior, to our own. Of the Senecas alone, thirty six were killed, and the return of this tribe is said by Mary Jamison to have produced the loudest wailing in the villages.§ Nor did the Mohawks escape without severe loss, along with their western associates. And there is no word in the Indian reminiscences of their wars, which is more emphatically recollected, than that of ORISKANY.||

As soon as the enemy fled, and the sounds of the war-

* Stone's Brant, vol. 1. p. 240, also Campbell's Tryon County.

† Campbell's Tryon County.

‡ Stone.

§ Narr. of Mary Jamison.

|| The Senecas of Allegany told me in July last, that they had lost thirty chiefs in the battle of Oriskany. They denied that they had burned eight officers at the stake, but said that these officers had been killed in running the gauntlet. See "Notes on the Iroquois," Albany, 1846, being "Senate Document twenty-four."

whoop died away, Herkimer's men prepared litters to carry off their wounded—between forty and fifty of which were constructed. The wounded General himself was thus carried by his affectionate soldiery, to his own house, below the Little Falls, with his leg badly shattered and banded. Ten days after the battle, amputation became necessary. The operation was unskilfully performed by a French surgeon in Arnold's detachment, who could not succeed in effectually staunching the blood, and he thus fell a victim to professional ignorance. But he preserved, on his dying bed, the same calmness and composure which had marked his conduct on the field. As he saw that his dissolution must shortly ensue, from the continued bleeding and the bad state of his wound, he called for his family bible, and having gathered his domestic circle around him, he read aloud, in a clear voice, the thirty-ninth psalm—"O Lord rebuke me not in thy wrath, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure; for thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore." The entire psalm is one of singular appropriateness; and, the acquaintance with the sacred volume which its selection evinces, proves that if, in the field, he was an undaunted soldier, he was not less on the threshold of another world, a trustful Christian. Other Generals have fallen in the arms of victory, but Nicholas Herkimer may be said to have fallen in the arms of his MAKER. Congress passed a resolution, and appropriated money to erect a monument to his memory—an act of justice yet unperformed: but his name has long been inscribed in the hearts of his countrymen as one of the noble patriots to whom we owe our national independence.

The death of Herkimer took place on the sixteenth day of the siege—to the events of which we now return. The fort was still hotly pressed, and surrounded with an infuriated host of Indian warriors, who were now irritated by their losses in the battle. The brave Herkimer had been killed; but Gansevoort still remained, and the flag of the fortress entrusted to his command, still waved undauntedly over

the sources of the Mohawk. Every evening and morning that flag was lowered and raised to the sounds of music and artillery, and thus renewed to the besiegers the offence excited by this new type of a NEW SOVEREIGN POWER. So the besieged and besiegers, felt that it was a struggle between king and people. This constituted the acme of the contest, which was conducted with a degree of bitterness and hatred, the strength of which it is now difficult to realize. The effect of the battle on the besieging army, in connection with the sortie, it is *now* known, had told well upon the American cause. That cause, however, still felt the hand of gloom, and needed all the patriotic firmness and military skill which it found, both in the commander and in the garrison.

Gansevoort was a man eminently fitted for the command entrusted to him, and like the heroic General Chassé, whom, in his resolute defence of Antwerp, he much resembled, he was calm under threats and summons of surrender, and maintained his equanimity amidst the explosion of shells, which, on one occasion, carried desolation to his hospital.* Of the particular results of the battle of Oriskany, fought for his relief, he then knew nothing but from rumor, which gave the most disastrous and exaggerated accounts. He saw himself in charge of a fortress, far removed from the point of succor, with the intervening forests filled with a wakeful and ruthless enemy. This enemy guarded every pass with the watchfulness of a panther for his prey. There were, in fact, no adequate roads and bridges to favor the approach of disciplined troops, and no open fields upon which they could manœuvre. Bonaparte himself, in such a predicament as Herkimer occupied, would have been put to the study of a species of tactics, of which he never dreamt. And it is no cause of wonder, that a yeoman soldiery, like those at Oriskany, should have been suddenly attacked and cut down by a masked foe. Wonderful was it, indeed, that they were not annihilated.

* L. S.

Stanwix was, indeed, at this period, like an oasis on the desert, to which a few brave men had retired. No Arab could be more keen for his prey than the Mohawks who surrounded it. Week after week there was nothing heard in that lone fortress, but the yell of the savage *without*, and the bursting bomb *within*. But these were sounds which had no quailing effect upon the American commander. Schooled in the patriotic circle which had a Schuyler, a Clinton, a Hamilton, aye, and a Washington for its prototypes and counsellors, he deemed his life a cheap tribute, if it could be given for the benefit of his country. Upon that high altar he had pledged his faith, nor is there the slightest evidence, in history or tradition, public or private, to shew that he ever for a moment faltered in this obligation, or swerved from the high principles of the contest. He knew that the eyes of America were upon him and his command, and felt that the results of the siege *were*, and *would* be, invested with a degree of importance far above that which would ordinarily attach to the numerical force actually employed. He had determined to maintain the post to the last extremity, and then, abandoning it at night, to cut his way through the enemy. This he expressed.*

The actual state of his provisions and military stores were such as by no means to render him free from apprehension, and these were sought to be deepened by popular reports, and by the artifices of the enemy. On the very night after the battle of Oriskany, St. Leger induced Col. Bellinger and Major Fry,* who were prisoners in his camp, to write a strong letter to Col. Gansevoort, exaggerating the losses of the day, and urging him to surrender. This was sent in by an officer, who made a verbal demand of surrender. Gansevoort answered, in these words: "Tell your commander that I can give no reply to a verbal summons, unless he makes it in person, except from the mouths of my cannon."†

The next day a flag of truce, borne by Col. Butler and two associates, approached the fort, with another message

* A brother-in-law of Gen. Herkimer. † Gansevoort papers, Alb.

for the American commander. Admission was granted. The three officers were blindfolded, and conducted to Gansevoort's quarters, where his field officers were assembled. To prevent observation on the state of the works, the window shutters had been closed, and candles lighted. Wine and some refreshments were spread on the table. Having partaken of these civilities, Major Ancrom, on the part of the truce, arose and addressed the commanding officers in a speech which embraced features of the usual gasconade and professed clemency of the British commanders of the era.

"I am directed," he said, "by Col. St. Leger, to inform the commandant of this fort that he has, with much difficulty, prevailed on the Indians to agree, that if the garrison, without farther resistance, shall be delivered up, with the public stores belonging to it, the officers and soldiers shall have all their baggage and private property secured to them. And in order that the garrison may have a sufficient pledge, Col. Butler accompanies me to assure them that not a hair of their heads shall be hurt. [Here an appeal was made to Col. B., and an assurance given by him.]

"I am likewise directed," he continued, "to remind the commandant that the defeat of General Herkimer must deprive the garrison of all hopes of relief, especially as Gen. Burgoyne is now in Albany, so that, sooner or later, the fort must fall into our hands. Col. St. Leger, from an earnest desire to prevent further bloodshed, hopes these terms will not be refused, as in this case it will be out of his power to make them again. It was with great difficulty that the Indians consented to the present arrangement, as it will deprive them of the plunder, which they always calculate upon on similar occasions."* He continued a studied address, in this strain. He said, that if these terms were rejected, the Indians, who were very numerous, and much exasperated and mortified from their losses in the late actions, could not be restrained from plundering the

* Stone's Brant.

property, and probably destroying the lives of the greater part of the garrison. Such, indeed, he said, was the ire on the loss of several of their favorite chiefs, who had been killed, that unless the surrender were agreed to, they threatened to march down the country, destroying the settlements, and not sparing even women and children.

The American officers sat uneasy while this singular oration was in the course of delivery. Col. Willett immediately replied in a spirited and energetic manner. "Do I understand you, Sir," said he, "that you come from the British commander, who invests this fort? By your uniform you appear yourself to be in the British service, yet if I comprehend your address, its purport is to tell the commander of this garrison that if he does not surrender it into the hands of the British commandant, this officer will send his Indians to murder our women and children. Please reflect, Sir, that their blood will be on your head, not ours. We are doing our duty. This garrison is committed to our charge, and we will take care of it. After you get out of it, you may turn round and survey its walls, but never, Sir, expect to come within them again, unless you come a prisoner.

"I consider the message you have brought, degrading for a civilized enemy to send, and by no means reputable for a British officer to carry. For my own part, I declare that before I would consent to deliver this garrison to such a murderous force as, by your own account, your army consists of, I would suffer my body to be filled with splinters, and set on fire at every pore."*

This was a language that spoke the spirit of the times, and should have been sufficient to teach the enemy the temper of the garrison they had to deal with. But such was not its effect. The verbal message above recited, was committed to writing, and communicated to Col. Gansevoort in the form of a letter, within a day or two. In this letter, St. Leger disclaims any intention of disrespect by his verbal

* Col. Willett's Narrative.

truce, pleads the old story of the impatience and temper of the Indians, and repeats the demand of a surrender. Gansevoort immediately sat down and answered with a laconic terseness, "that having been entrusted by the UNITED AMERICAN STATES, with the command of the fort, it was his determined resolution to defend it, to the last extremity, against *all* their enemies."*

This importunity of St. Leger rather betrayed the weakness of his position, than afforded evidence of his strength; and the garrison appeared to have taken this view of it. It must be evident to all who are acquainted with the Indian character, their impatience of the restraints of camp life, and the mal-adaptation of their habits for long continued exertion, that they began to weary of the siege. They had lost many men. They had been disappointed of plunder at Oriskany, for it is to be remembered that Herkimer had returned, with all his baggage and camp stores. Still, as these facts were at the time unknown to the American commander, and he had no knowledge or information of any *other* reinforcements, his position was far from being easy. His supplies of provisions were fast diminishing. His ordnance stores had never been ample. The prospect of relief, after Herkimer's fall, seemed gloomy. The enemy pressed the siege, and were incessant in their attempts to stir up and embody the loyalists of the Mohawk Valley, to whom messenger after messenger, and proclamation on proclamation was sent.

To relieve the growing apprehensions felt from these causes, Col. Willett offered to make the attempt to pass through the enemies lines at night. He selected as his companion for this perilous duty, Major Stockwell, and they together left the fort, four days after the battle of Oriskany, at ten o'clock at night, armed only with spears, and without any baggage to impede them. They did not even carry a blanket, and took only a small supply of crackers and cheese. Leaving the sally-port unperceived, they crept on their hands and knees along the edge of a morass, to the

* Gansevoort papers, Albany.

river, and by crawling over a log, at a known spot, they succeeded in getting off, and eluding the Indians. But owing to the darkness of the night, they soon got entangled in a bog, and while in this position they heard the barking of an Indian dog, and were thus made sensible that they were in the vicinity of the enemy. There was nothing to be done but stand perfectly still, and wait for daylight. They then proceeded northerly a few miles, and then southerly, tracing a zig-zag course, and sometimes adopting the Indian method of concealing their tracks, by walking in the water, or stepping on stones. In this manner they passed the whole of the first day, without a halt, and at night they laid down, without striking a fire, for fear of discovery. The following day their provisions failed, but they fortunately came to an opening, caused by a windfall, where there were an abundance of raspberries and black-berries, which refreshed them, and at three o'clock the same day, they reached fort Dayton, at the present site of Herkimer.*

From this moment, the prospect of the relief of the fort brightens, although some of the means which led to its relief were curious. Willett here learned that as soon as the intelligence of Herkimer's defeat reached Gen. Schuyler, at Saratoga, this vigilant officer had ordered Generals Arnold and Larned to march, with the Massachusetts's brigade, to Gansevoort's relief. He immediately took horses and proceeded to Albany, where he joined Arnold, and within four days, was on his way back with this officer, for Fort Dayton.

In the meantime, an event of seemingly small importance transpired, which is believed to have had a controlling influence on the enemy in raising the siege. Col. Weston, who commanded Fort Dayton, received intelligence of the assemblage of a party of tories and disaffected persons, one night at the house of one Shoemaker, two miles above the fort. He immediately sent out a detachment of troops, who came upon them unawares, and took every soul prison-

* Willett's Narrative.

ers. Among them was one Hon Yost Schuyler, a singular being, who lived with his mother and a brother, at the Little Falls, where he was well known to the Indians. He spoke the Mohawk fluently, and although regarded as a simpleton by the whites, the Indians had a peculiar respect for him, from the superstitious feeling with which they regard all lunatics and persons supposed to have a gift. Hon Yost, with others of the captured party, was condemned to be shot. On hearing of his doom, his mother and brother came up from the Little Falls, and made the strongest appeal for his pardon, but all in vain. Arnold remained inflexible. The mother's importunities, however, knew no bounds, and she wearied the commander with her often grotesque appeals. Arnold at length told her he would pardon her son on one condition, for the faithful performance of which, her other son should be detained as a hostage. It was this: that Hon Yost should fly to the camp of St. Leger, and alarm him by the report of large reinforcements coming in hot haste from the camp at Saratoga. She offered to be the hostage herself, but the commander would not listen to this, but took the brother.

We will now return to the garrison of Fort Stanwix, where Gansevoort remained in ignorance of all that had transpired for his relief. He had heard nothing of Willett, from the time he had passed out of the sally-port, and knew not whether he had escaped, or fallen into the hands of the Indians. Twelve days had passed away since his departure, and they were twelve days of incessant watching, toil and warfare. St. Leger had opened trenches near the glacis of the fort, where he had succeeded in drawing two parallels, but this work was advanced very slowly and at great hazard, from the severity of Gansevoort's fire-arms. One and twenty days had been consumed in the siege. Forty-six men, including four officers, had been killed or wounded in the defence. Herkimer had been defeated. All looked gloomy and forboding.

Such was the state of things in the fort on the 22d day of August, when the men on the ramparts were surprised

to behold some extraordinary movements in the enemy's camps. There was a sudden and extensive breaking up of the Indian encampments. As far as the eye could see, there were trains of Indians on their retreat. Nor was it long before the columns of St. Leger, Butler, and Sir John Johnson, which had invested the fort with such proud array, were in full retreat for the banks of Wood creek. Indeed, a perfect panic seemed to have prevailed. St. Leger left his tents standing, and abandoned his cannon and mortars in their embrasures, with much of his camp equipage. In a word, the fort was saved. The arms of the Republic had triumphed. It was the first dawning of that brilliant triumph, which crowned the autumn of the year at Saratoga.

What effect the mission of Hon Yost Schuyler had in the immediate retreat of the enemy, we are not left to infer from conjecture. He executed his engagement with fidelity, although, as his conduct afterwards proved, he was a tory in heart. As soon as he left fort Dayton, he took off his coat, and riddled it with bullet holes. On reaching fort Stanwix, he went directly to the Mohawk camp. "See," said he, pointing to his coat, "how narrowly I have escaped the rebels. They are coming upon us like a torrent, with horsemen and cannon, and will be here by sun-set. Fly, or you are lost." When the chief asked him how many troops were coming, he pointed to the leaves on the trees. The news immediately spread through the camp, and he was sent for by St. Leger. Being questioned, he confirmed all that the British commander had heard. A retreat to Canada was at once resolved on.

But the Indians waited for no orders. They had already been tired of the seige. They had been disappointed in every expectation. They were told, on leaving Niagara and Oswego, that they should have an easy victory. That they were not needed to fight, but only to look on, and see the conflict, and triumph.* They had been flattered with

* Mary Jemison.

hopes of plunder, but had received nothing. They were promised the re-possession of the Mohawk valley, but were now driven from its very threshold. Their pride and avarice had been stimulated in every possible manner, and disappointed in all. The words of Hon Yost were to them oracular. He was a known friend and loyalist. He was himself a half Mohawk.* No one doubted them, and no one hesitated as to his course. All the eloquence of Brant was in vain, and the golden schemes of Indian glory held up to their imaginations by Butler and Sir John, vanished in a moment. Fear took the ascendancy in their breasts, and it was a species of fear without limits.

All our Indian tribes are governed by impulses. They are the most capricious beings of the human family—excited by a rumor—governed by a dream—led by a superstition—constantly changing—always in doubt—never fixed. One moment led by demoniacal fury—the next appearing as a noble messenger of mercy. A friend or a foe, as associations govern them; but never under the power of inductive reason, and ever subject to be unduly led and persuaded by those whom they, for the moment, confide in. Such are our red men, the continent over. And the disappointed Mohawks, with their brilliant leader, Thyendanegea, and his western associates but vindicated their unity of general character, when they resolved, at a rush, to quit the precincts of the beleagured fort. Not only did they fly, and fly at once, but they left St. Leger no option in following them. He was, in fact, compelled to desert his camp, and his hasty retreat was more like that of the Syrians from the gates of Samaria, than any thing in American history. If it did not bring bread to the hungry and starving, it gave arms and shelter and clothing to his enemies. It was, in fact, a FLIGHT.

Nor was this the worst effect, so far as policy and humanity are concerned in human warfare. The government that employs an Indian force, employs a power which it is

* J. Brodhead, Esq., Utica.

impossible, at all times, to command. A savage, out for blood and spoils, if foiled in one way, will revenge himself in another. The retreating Iroquois fell upon the boats and stores of their flying confederates, on Wood Creek and the Onondaga, plundered them of their provisions, and in some cases actually tomahawked their defenders.* This is stated on British authority. The only part of the force which escaped their fury, or commanded their respect, was the royal troops, commanded by St. Leger himself.

It was not only a flight, but an escape. Gansevoort took every military advantage of honorable warfare of the retreating foe, but he could not venture his reduced and exhausted garrison in a pursuit. He did more and better. He ministered comfort to the wounded enemy, and suffered no act of inhumanity to stain his fair laurels.† Every wounded man and prisoner fell into the hands of a Samaritan.

The next day, at four o'clock in the afternoon, the advance of the Massachusetts troops from Saratoga, in their fine state of discipline, with four brass field pieces, and banners displayed, marched into the fort.‡ It was a fit consummation for one of the most heroic struggles of the revolution. The news of it spreading on the wings of victory, served to cheer the drooping spirits of the friends of liberty, far and near, and to inspire fresh energy in the cause. The defence itself was a blow struck for independence, which saved a wide and patriotic frontier from the tomahawk and scalping knife. It rolled back to the north, the heavy and threatening cloud, which cast its fearful shadows over the west. It seemed to herald in a new phase in the cause. It was the first of a series of victories, each more important than the last, till the red cross of St. George was struck forever on the land, and the stars and stripes waved in its stead. Within two months Burgoyne laid down his arms at Saratoga, Vaughan and Clinton re-

* Stone's Brant.
Gansevoort.

† The late Dr. Woodruff of Albany—Physician under
‡ L. S.

treated down the Hudson. The territory of New York was redeemed. Joy was infused in every patriot heart. Greetings were exchanged between the prime leaders of the revolution. It sent a glow of joy into the heart of Washington. And it was the influence of these victories upon the courts of Europe, beginning at the lone fortress of Stanwix, that paved the way for a treaty of alliance with France, and for the final recognition of our independence.

A single word more remains. Gentlemen, while we preserve the historical remembrance of these events, and cherish the names of the noble and gallant men of '76, who perilled their lives for the cause of freedom; while we bear in mind the price of this freedom itself, let us not forget the memory of an ardent youth, who, at 14 years of age, rushed into one of the earliest battles of the revolution, and shared in the contest for our independence. A man who was spared by Providence to live through a long life of usefulness and high honor, and has just descended to the tomb, as we learn within the week, at the patriarchal age of 79. I allude to ANDREW JACKSON.

THE END.









